Purple Martin
# CHATTER

Summer 2024 | Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin | Volume 12 Issue 3

# Bartus' Host MF 2024
## *Lots of birds-lots of fun!*

## Fledging Season is Here
***President's Message***

## *8-Year Old Bird Recaptured*

## VENTING GOURDS

## *Geolocator RETRIEVED*

## MartinFest 2025

Chuck/Annette Bartus Colony -*Photo Chuck Bartus*

# Fledging Season is Here!

*Les Rhines*

Hello again and welcome to the summer issue of *Purple Martin Chatter.* As the title indicates, fledging season is here, and has been occurring at most colonies for the past few weeks. I would like to say that things are going well and according to plan, but that is not the case this year. 2024 started off very well with good numbers of birds arriving at many colonies, which resulted from the reports that I had received, good numbers of mating pairs and lots of eggs. As I said, things were going well, but then the weather changed. We went through prolonged stretches of overcast skies, wind, and rain which had taken a toll on our birds, primarily the young, but adults too. Just to get some perspective on this, here's a quick comparison. A Milwaukee weather station reported that in 2023 from mid-May to the 4th of July weekend they reported approximately 2.5 inches of rain. We should note that 2023 was an exceptionally dry summer. However, this year, 2024 during that same time frame they reported almost 11.5 inches of rain, with some of those showers producing 2 to 3 inches in just hours causing damp humid conditions in nest boxes, and gourds, requiring landlords to do frequent nest replacements. Another example, on July 5th, Greg Zimmermann reported that at his colony in Sheboygan Falls 3.5 inches of rain fell in just one half-hour. In no time at all he had lake property. Many landlords statewide reported huge losses of young during this time; the effect of which will not be fully known for some time, but we need to continue to be diligent in monitoring our colonies for any problems, change out wet nests when necessary, and continue to supplemental feed as needed. By the way, here's how you can help; please send in your colony reports to Dick Nikolai at the end of the season. Dick complies the data and provides a comprehensive report that helps us understand what's happening to the purple martin population in our state. Send reports to Dick at prairiechicken@att.net. Also, as an organization we will do our best to help keep landlords informed about conditions that require by landlords to protect the birds through emails blasts and our Facebook posts.

**Martin Fest 2024.** This year's MartinFest was held at the colony of Chuck and Annette Bartus on June 29. Chuck and Annette were very gracious hosts and provided the 80 plus purple martin enthusiasts a beautiful property near St Cloud, WI. You could not ask for a better venue in which to roam and view Purple Martins. Those that attended the event were not disappointed, WPMA board members and volunteers offered seminars on attracting martins to a new colony, supplemental feeding, and trapping sparrows and starlings. In addition, board members Dick NIkolai and Bob Ring banded young and adult birds to a captive and enthusiastic audience. The silent auction was a success with all donated items being sold. Our treasurer Deb Zimmermann will share the report later in this newsletter. Many thanks to all that were involved in organizing and helping at the event, and of course, thank you to all that attended. FYI, planning has begun for 2025, and we will be sharing those details with you very soon.

**Next President.** Good news, Nicki Schumacher has agreed to serve as a co-president with me for this next year. Many of you may remember Nicki, she was an original founding member of the organization and served as the secretary. Nicki stepped away from the association for a few years because of other commitments but now has agreed to come back and help the organization move forward. Nicki, and her husband Joel have a flourishing martin colony at their home outside of Sheboygan Falls, WI. Nicki also helps manage the public colony at Jetzer's lake near Howard's Grove, WI. Welcome back Nicki, we look forward to working with you.

**Tell us your story.** We would like to hear from you, our readers, please share your stories with us, just submit your stories to our editor Gail Bolden. Please include photos. In this issue I share a technical tip forwarded to us by board member Larry Lienau on venting gourds. Dick Nikolai provides a brief report about the effects that the weather has had on our birds, and lots of pictures of MartinFest 2024.

Well, we've reached the point in our martin season when young fledge, and it won't be long when we start to see fewer and fewer birds at our colonies. Those adults and new fledglings make their way to the roosts to build up reserves needed to prepare for the migration back to the wintering grounds. Enjoy them while you have them.

Let me finish by saying thank you to everyone for the hard work and dedication you put forth in support of Purple Martins. I know that I can speak for the entire board in saying thank you. Again, enjoy your birds and enjoy this issue of *Purple Martin Chatter.*

# A Word from the V.P.

*Vice President Greg Zimmermann*

Another season is well underway, our annual MartinFest was a big hit, thanks to all that helped out, and a special thanks to Chuck and Annette Bartus who hosted this year. My wife Debbie and I did apresentation on supplemental feeding, and as it turned out a few days later our weather turned bad enough that feeding was needed. Some colonies lost a lot of birds, and some of us made it through virtually unscathed. I can't preach enough when bad weather arrives you need to stay ahead of conditions that warrant feeding. Also, do any nest changes if nests are rain soaked, blow flies and mites will invade yournests in rainy weather. In the next few weeks most young will fledge and if your like me, I'm already in the fledgling stage. Enjoy the rest of your summer and hopefully this weather will change for the better.

Here, Greg and Deb give a presentation on the importance of supplemental feeding. The Zimmermanns have a large colony and supplemental feed as needed. They showed their method to prepare eggs and dehydrated mealworms and demonstrated how they flip the food up to the birds for them to catch on the wing. Other foods landlords supplement with are crickets, live mealworms, and superworms. Platform feeders help feed more martins at one time for those with larger colonies. Whatever the method, whatever the food, train your birds to accept feedings, and it will improve their chance for survival during inclement weather.

*-Photo Gail Bolden*

**Memberships** As a reminder, WPMA memberships expired on December 31, 2023. You must maintain a current membership to receive the 2024 *Purple Martin Chatter* newsletter in an email form. However, beginning in January 2024, we posted all four issues of the previous 2023 newsletters to our webpage. Please consider becoming a member, memberships are only $10.00 annually and run from January 1 through December 31, please contact Deb Zimmermann – Treasurer if you would like to become a member. Deb's contact information is provided at the end of the newsletter.

We will continue to offer these services to everyone: public meetings via Zoom, annual MartinFest event, statewide mentor program, free site evaluations, and managed public colonies. Please consider a WPMA membership for 2024 and 2025.

# Bartus' Host MF2024

Chuck and Annette served up a great lunch for event goers.

The barn was the perfect spot for the presentations, silent auction, and displays. There was enough room to mingle and chat with other martin enthusiasts.

President Les Rhines gave a presentation at MartinFest on a plethora of things that are recommended to improve your colony's chances of success. Predator guards were shown as well as devices to attract martins via CDs and the songbird magnet. Les also showed a variety of traps, both ground traps (which he elevates by mounting it on a stake so he can move it around his colony) and traps that go inside housing. Traps are imperative if your colony site is visited by House Sparrows and European Starlings. Les also stressed the importance of monitoring by conducting nest checks, keeping a log of first arrivals, eggs, hatched eggs, and fledge success. Monitoring also includes lowering the boxes after rain or wind events to check on birds.

*-Photo Deb Zimmermann*

Silent Auction tables, presentation area, handmade birdhouses displayed for sale, Purple Martin information displays, tote sales, all in one massive barn and there was still room to roam!

*-Photo Gail Bolden*

Greg and Deb discuss the importance of supplemental feeding.

Display of a repeating sparrow trap with a live decoy. Its best to keep a female to attract the male during the breeding season (and offer food and water). When the HOSP juveniles fledge, one captured bird will oftentimes attract the rest of the brood. The ST-1 trap is very effective for attracting juveniles as well. Continue trapping throughout fall and it will make your spring a little easier!

Another view of the Silent Auction table and our Purple Martin displays.

Dean Heinen displaying the houses he builds for purchase. *-Photo Deb Zimmermann*

*-Photos Gail Bolden*

# The Bartus Colony

The Bartus' colony consists of two T-14s, another house with 4-gourds *(not pictured)*, a 12 -gourd rack, and an 18-gourd rack made out of an old satellite dish. All cavities are filled and it's not a surprise, as Chuck takes great care of his colony. In fact, the birds like his location so much, bird bander, Bob Ring recaptured an ASY male during MartinFest that he banded as a nestling at Chuck's colony on July 9, 2016! An 8-year old Purple Martin! Chuck does supplemental feedings, and it is not a surprise that his colony is flourishing. Congratulations on the recapture!

In addition to placing a band on the martins, part of the banding process includes weighing the bird and getting wing and tail measurements. There were several adult birds captured while Dick and Bob were banding. Each adult bird was underweight, a sign of the stressors surrounding migration, brooding, and feeding young. A good weight for the birds at this point is 50 grams, and all were under that, with at least one weighing 40 grams. Despite supplemental feeding, the stress of the journey and breeding process takes its toll. Train your birds, you'll reap the rewards. You may not be able to save them all, but its an incredibly noble conservation effort!

# Pre-Banding

Eventgoers gather to listen to Dick Nikolai explain the process of banding and he takes general questions from the audience as Bob Ring is setting the remote control traps to catch the adult birds for capture.

*-Photos Gail Bolden*

# Setting the Traps

Birdbander, Bob Ring setting the traps to capture the adults for banding. *-Photo Gail Bolden*

Before birdbanding takes place, observing the colony is the first step. Bob looks for a good candidate for banding, and that is one that is very attentive to the nestlings. They make frequent trips to feed, making them a good candidate for recapture.

Bob holds a sub-permittee license and bands under the guidance of Dick Nikolai, who has been a Master Bird Bander since 1988. They make a great team and we are grateful for their expertise and dedication to the WPMA!

# Banding

Master Birdbander, Dick Nikolai is prepared and ready to receive his first adult to band. Bob has the first bird in a tall five gallon pail.

Birdbander, Bob Ring shows the audience the first adult who is ready to band, while Dick explains the banding process. The birds banded were very calm in Bob's hands, which is a good sign.

Dick further holds the birds in such a way where he can feel their heartbeat, which tells him if the bird is in distress. Dick has banded not only over 10,000 Purple Martins, but everything from waterfowl to the smallest of songbirds.

*-Photos Gail Bolden*

# Venting Gourd Covers-Another Option

*From the mind of Board Member, Larry Lienau*

While there are many ways/options to vent gourds, Larry has provided yet another alternative method. Larry, like most landlords, is someone that is always looking for ways to improve and maintain the health of the birds at his colony. Here is Larry's take on venting the caps or covers on gourds. Thanks, Larry! *(Les Rhines)*

*-Photos Larry Lienau*

-With the cap tight on the gourd, use a small hand held router with a ¼ inch bit and cut (3) 1/4 inch wide by 1 1/2-inch-long slots in the cap (Remember, the slots need to be horizontal with the cap being tight).

-Then make a little roof over the slots so the rain can't get in.

-Make the roof out of wood, and attach the roof from the inside with two stainless steel screws.

That will vent the gourd. My gourds with this vent stay nice and dry because there's plenty of airflow.

# Survival of the Fittest

This was the first of several jumpers at my colony this year. A 24-day old from a gourd who was not going back to that gourd, no matter what. Seems ironic that his perch of choice with each descent was on top of a trap full of HOSPs, and he was unfazed by the trapped bird who pecked at his feet. Smart bird who fledged three days later. *This is why we do what we do!*

*-Ed.*

***Does your mother know you're out here?***

*-Photo Gail Bolden*

**Public Colonies** Did you know that the WPMA supports many public martin colonies throughout the state of Wisconsin? Check them out, better yet, adopt a colony. Most of these public colonies are actively looking for volunteers to help manage the colony, most notably, by doing nest checks. Your involvement could be the difference in the success of the colony *(Les).*

# End of Year Reports

As the season winds down and the housing gets cleaned and stored for the winter, please think about sending Dick Nikolai your End-of-Year Reports. During MartinFest, I spoke with many people who monitor their colonies, but do not send in a report to Dick.

*Dick requests just a couple of things:*

1. Date of first arrival
2. How many pairs
3. How many eggs laid
4. How many eggs hatched
5. How many birds fledged
6. Any anecdotal evidence that you may think is important.

Send your reports to *prairiechicken@att.net*

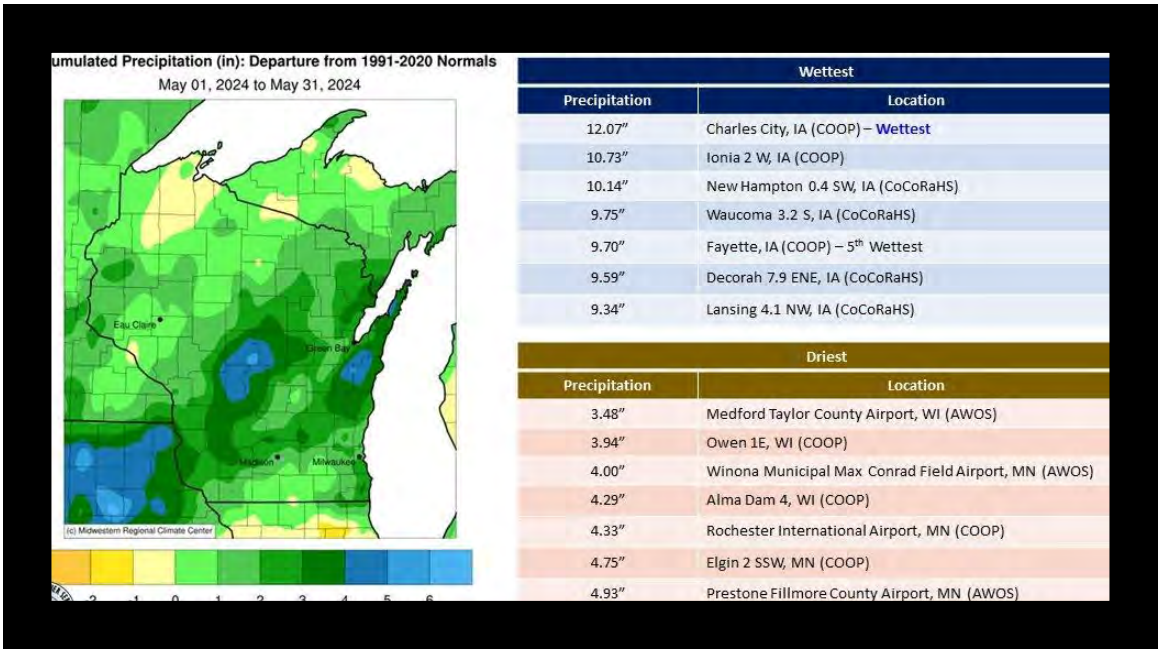
Dick puts together a very detailed report on the Wisconsin Purple Martin population that is included in the winter newsletter. *–Ed.*

# Oh! What a Relief It Is

*Dick Nikolai*

Today has been the fourth day essentially without rain since the middle of May through the first twelve days of July. Almost eight weeks have passed without truly feeling like it was spring or summer instead of swimming in mud so to speak (See Figures 1, 2 & 3). It seemed that we would never see the sun for greater than a single day at a time. In between we have had rain, rain, and more rain combined with many days of very windy weather exceedingly more than 15 miles per hour (mph). Some of the windy days were exceeding 30 mph. Along with every other day of change of weather were winds from the north or northeast or from the south or southwest. Very little calm or stable days. Note the past four days have been light winds under 10 mph with two less than five. Oops! Spoke to soon for on the evening of the fifth day a deluge. Note that I live in Appleton so your weather may have been slightly different. When the calls or emails or the conversations have taken place from late June to the 5th of July, they were somewhat frantic of losses of young ranging generally in ages from about ten to 25 days of age. Doing a quick canvasing in most avenues about ten percent of the young did not make it. For our site at High Cliff State Park, it was 40+ young affected. Some were whole broods and some created a reduction that fit with the pair's age or their competency of feeding them.

Let us surmise the season up to this writing on July 14. Our Purple Martin families arrived early at the end of March or early April for quite a few of us. Few days were spent feeding the adults and both Bob Ring and I did a quick check on weights of four of the new arrivals about 15 days later (April 10). Weights ranged from 59.9 grams to 61.3 grams. Not bad for flying 4,000 miles and fueling up. Shortly afterwards numerous storms moved through the southern United States disrupting migration for us in the northern part of the country. A few people wondered if they would have any scouts for it was a long wait until the last few days of April. Even for us we had under 20 martins that needed a few handouts from time to time. As we progress into May those storms continued in the south holding migrants back through almost mid-May when migration entailed many older martins and combined with the arrivals of second year martins (SY's). Weather went into a mode around May 15th of very warm temperatures with a cool down generally within 36 to 48 hours. This created uncertainty for early adults from May 13th when our first eggs were laid to the end of the month of May. Much fighting from all age classes went on from a normal situation where lots of the after second year adults would normally be paired and cavities selected. Demands for egg laying, pair bonds and cavity security along with mating made the crisis of foul weather more exasperating. As things sorted out some martins needed to renest for the eggs were not fertile and addled along with others having one or more eggs not hatch. Insects (lake flies) normally are a nuisance for about 10 ➞



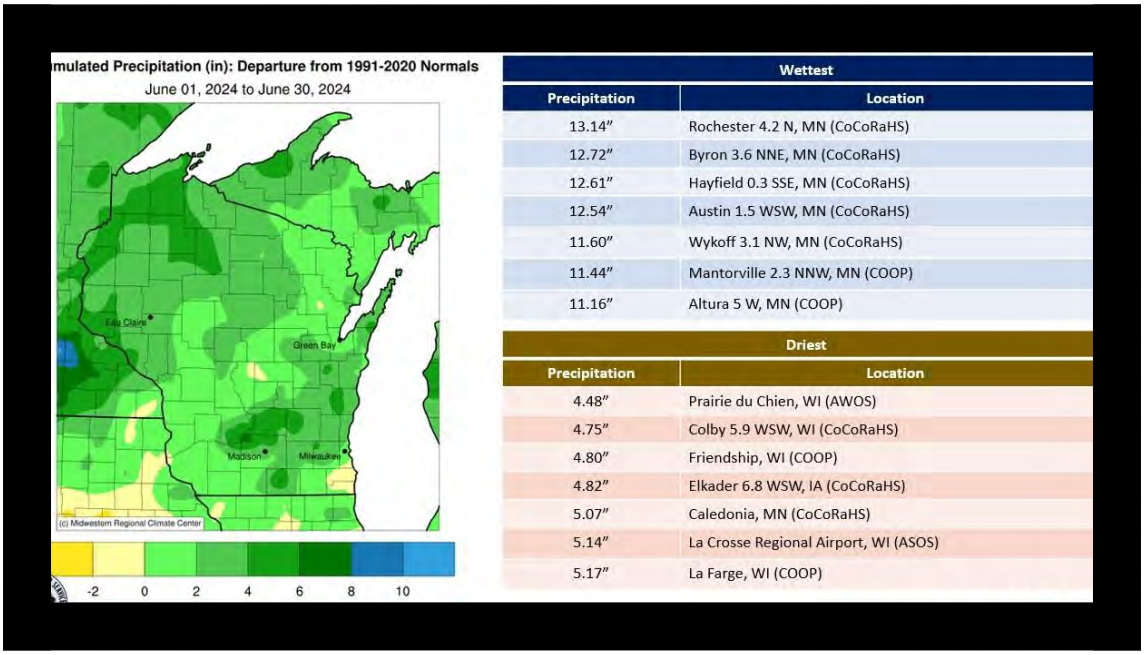

| Wettest | |
|---|---|
| Precipitation | Location |
| 12.07″ | Charles City, IA (COOP) – Wettest |
| 10.73″ | Ionia 2 W, IA (COOP) |
| 10.14″ | New Hampton 0.4 SW, IA (CoCoRaHS) |
| 9.75″ | Waucoma 3.2 S, IA (CoCoRaHS) |
| 9.70″ | Fayette, IA (COOP) – 5th Wettest |
| 9.59″ | Decorah 7.9 ENE, IA (CoCoRaHS) |
| 9.34″ | Lansing 4.1 NW, IA (CoCoRaHS) |

| Driest | |
|---|---|
| Precipitation | Location |
| 3.48″ | Medford Taylor County Airport, WI (AWOS) |
| 3.94″ | Owen 1E, WI (COOP) |
| 4.00″ | Winona Municipal Max Conrad Field Airport, MN (AWOS) |
| 4.29″ | Alma Dam 4, WI (COOP) |
| 4.33″ | Rochester International Airport, MN (COOP) |
| 4.75″ | Elgin 2 SSW, MN (COOP) |
| 4.93″ | Prestone Fillmore County Airport, MN (AWOS) |

**Figure 1:** This pictorial of rainfall from the National Weather Service in La Crosse shows concentrations by cities in the west half of Wisconsin and Midwest in actual precipitation along with a graph of where pictorially it was the wettest for May.

days in mid-May but failed on the large numbers but persisted almost up to the present. Lots of dragonflies too were seen earlier than normal.

With rain occurring often *(See Figure 1)* during May that meant more time searching for flying insects. While this brought down weights, there was nothing extra ordinary for feeding young not yet present. When banding martins through mostly mid-June their weights were in the 50-55 grams which is quite normal. Once we hit mid-June many nests had young present *(See Figure 2)*.




| Wettest | |
|---|---|
| **Precipitation** | **Location** |
| 13.14″ | Rochester 4.2 N, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 12.72″ | Byron 3.6 NNE, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 12.61″ | Hayfield 0.3 SSE, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 12.54″ | Austin 1.5 WSW, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 11.60″ | Wykoff 3.1 NW, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 11.44″ | Mantorville 2.3 NNW, MN (COOP) |
| 11.16″ | Altura 5 W, MN (COOP) |

| Driest | |
|---|---|
| **Precipitation** | **Location** |
| 4.48″ | Prairie du Chien, WI (AWOS) |
| 4.75″ | Colby 5.9 WSW, WI (CoCoRaHS) |
| 4.80″ | Friendship, WI (COOP) |
| 4.82″ | Elkader 6.8 WSW, IA (CoCoRaHS) |
| 5.07″ | Caledonia, MN (CoCoRaHS) |
| 5.14″ | La Crosse Regional Airport, WI (ASOS) |
| 5.17″ | La Farge, WI (COOP) |

Rain alone is not the culprit but its effect along with cool, cloudy, and windy conditions during and after events that creates the perfect setting for the parents to lose young. First their own demands to carry out their daily functions. Then add the additional demands of feeding 3-6 extra mouths. Not so much when they are under ten days of age but these demanding young take their toll when you consider a normal average for ASY's take about 10-20 times per hour to feed and SY's 5-10 times per hour when they are at optimum health. These parents go out up to five miles away along with catching flying insects from 160 to 500 feet in elevation at 25-30 miles per hour (mph).

Now we throw in winds exceeding 15 mph in June which was 21days with several stretches of 6-7 days in a row. Add the first three days in July over 25 mph along with one rain event with cloudy conditions before the big rain events on July 4th evening and July 5th throughout the day. All of that having taken place it was the perfect storm along with declines in weights of the adults in late June being around 45 grams adding to this mix to assist in self-preservation for the adults while attempting to feed the heartiest of their young. There are more factors yet for this for by now you get my point. This was not just a problem for the Fox River Valley but a state wide problem.

Oh! It was a relief to see four to five days with relatively quiet winds, plenty of sunshine, and very little rain from July 9-13. We count our losses but we also should count our blessings for you should notice the forecast for July (Figure 3). Last evening (July 13) was a reminder after over several inches of rain fell. Hope there is an end in sight for we all want to see everyone of those young to make it. After all they are family. Our proper care and efforts are real to assist this species onward.

**Figure 2:** This pictorial of rain fall from the National Weather Service in La Crosse shows concentrations by cities in the west half of Wisconsin and Midwest in actual precipitation along with a graph of where pictorially it was the wettest for June. Note the lighter green shown through the northeast going to the south-west. This was mostly still above the average for June.

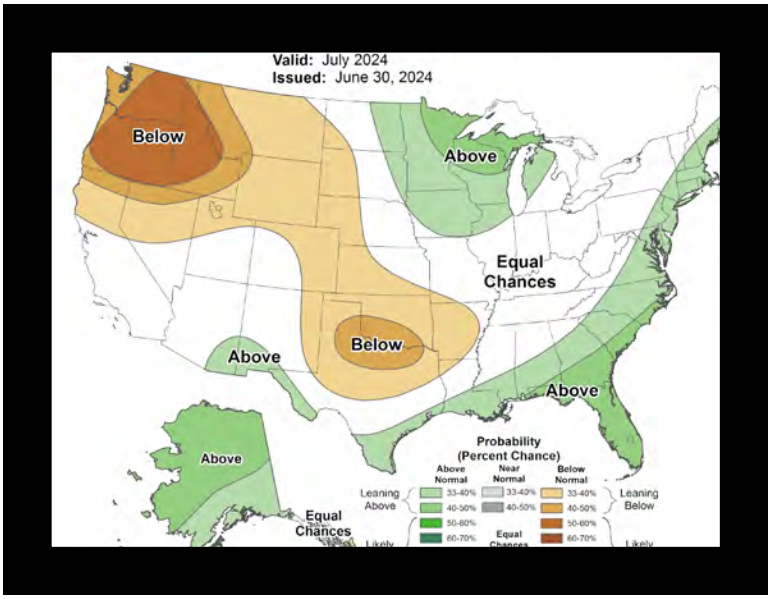



**Figure 3:** This pictorial outlook of rain fall for July from the NOAA has held true at least until July 9. On July 13 it has continued with threats to add more in late afternoon.

## A Very Important Purple Martin

As part of our mission to preserve and restore the Purple Martin population in Wisconsin, geolocators are purchased annually in the hope of tracking the migrating birds. In the past, two geolocators were recovered, but for various reasons, we were unable to retrieve the data. This year we were lucky, as bird bander, Dick Nikolai captured an ASY with a geolocator that was placed on him in July 2023. The tracker is in great shape, and we hope to retrieve the data and we will report back on what we discover!

*-Photo by Dick Nikolai*

## Treasurer's Report

*Treasurer Deb Zimmermann*

| | |
|---|---|
| MartinFest | $1671.50 |
| Food | -288.13 |
| Porta Pot | -220.00 |
| ***Total*** | ***$1163.37*** |

A special thank you to the person who put $50 in our donation jar. Also, to our hosts, Chuck and Annette Bartus, it was obvious you have hosted before, you were very gracious to our group. Thanks, Terry for your great salesmanship. Bob and Dick for the bird banding presentation. It is amazing that you found a previously banded bird from 8 years ago. Gail for organizing the silent auction and all you do with the newsletter. Les for being our leader, your presentation and all you do behind the scenes. Greg for teaching feeding techniques. Dean for bringing in your birdhouses, they are beautifully made. We had a great day of sun, education and great people. It was nice to see everyone!

## *It's Official!*

# MARTINFest2025

**June 28, 2025** 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Oconto City Park (Bird City destination)

5182 County Hwy N, Oconto, WI 54153

**MartinFest 2025 planning is in the works! Look for details in the Winter Issue of *Purple Martin Chatter!***

## Many Thanks to All That Donated-*We Couldn't Do It Without You!*

As a small volunteer organization, we are 100% reliant on donations to operate. Thank you to both of our individual donors and corporate donors who are always very generous to our organization. A special thanks to our newest donor, *S&K Manufacturing* who included their new BoAxis gourd with their donations, which was a hit at the silent auction! *Thank you all for your support!*

- Mary Ward
- Dean Heinen
- Jackie Heinen
- Dick Nikolai
- Larry Lienau
- Alan Sowinski
- Bob Frankel
- Les Rhines

- PMCA (*purplemartin.org)*
- Troyer Gourds (*troyergourds.com) 814-232-5048*
- Birds Choice *(birdschoice.com) 866-995-BIRD*
- S&K Manufacturing (*skmfg.com) 800-764-8688*

***Please consider patronizing the above organizations for all of your Purple Martin needs and let them know that WPMA sent you!***

*Purple Martin Chatter* is a publication of the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association, an organization dedicated to preserving and restoring the Purple Martin population in Wisconsin. It is published four times annually in January, April, July, and October.

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PM tips or stories? We welcome member's submissions! Please limit submissions to 500 words or less; photos must be your own for publication. Direct articles in Word format and jpeg photographs to editor.

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